

# Reclaiming uncertainty - para-rational approach to knowing.

## *Abstract*

Divination's paradoxical basis in addressing the irrational with irrational means reclaims uncertainty from the fear of incompleteness and contradiction to the space of implied infinities, of open-ended future possibilities. I argue in favour of divination as a para-rational (both rational and irrational) paradigm involving complementary modes of cognition (shades of consciousness) in creating alternative possibilities in weather prediction to the hegemonic western model of rational science as the only legitimate way of knowing. Construction of acceptable knowledge of the official and exoteric is underpinned by social and economic endeavors lead by political agenda while esoteric understandings are banished underground as superstitious, ignorant and irrational. Similarity, knowledge produced through discourse is implicated by history, concepts of truth, representation and knowledge are only meaningful within a specific historical context. Modern day scientific predictive methods such as weather forecasting can be seen as an extension of 19th century's doctrine of progress, an advance that was dependent on a need to conceptualise and generalise a particular rational understanding of the future.

## *Introduction*

Divination as the practice of exploring the uncharted in order to elicit answers to questions beyond the range of ordinary human understanding, has been employed since our ancestors as a means of spiritual and temporal guidance and knowledge making. With these beliefs, the universe was codified with meaning and knowledge that informed both subjectivity and objectivity. The mechanisms of non-number divination and number divination can offer insights to the inner workings of the how the irrational can make sense of the irrational, a productive loophole adding meaning to reality rather subtracting from it. According to C.G. Jung, divination is based on synchronicity, that being the sum of meaningful events as opposed to the mentally graspable notion of linearity in causal thinking. Unlike causal thinking in which separates psychic events and physical events, only noticing how physical events produce, or have a causal effect upon each other and on psychological events, synchronistic thinking, or the classic way of thinking in China, is *thinking in fields*, and makes no difference between psychological and physical facts. As a student of Jung, Marie-Luise von Franz talks about Western epistemology's orientation as extraverted, primarily focusing on the events before the looking at the abstract compared the Eastern way in applying an intuitive mental model to read the event.

To understand the changing perspective on internal and external modes of inquiry in the West, one must consider the history of the English word 'divination' of Latin origin *divinus* meaning divine, as an improvement on the original Greek word *mantic*, meaning madness, raving, insanity or inspiration. In contrast, *oionistic*, another Greek term referred to the inductive art of the uninspired and sane who inquire purely from human reasoning. Plato concludes that "both in name and in fact, madness is nobler than sanity [for] the first proceeds from a god, the other from mere men" (Helmbold and Rabinowitz quoted in Tedlock, 2001). Later in the 19th century, at a time that was establishing authority on scientific rational knowledge, perception towards reason and intuition becomes inverted. What was once seen as dull and an

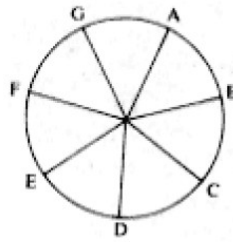
uninspired way of inducing a conclusion came to be understood as acceptable knowledge guided by reason, while intuitive forms became deemed as 'superstitious', a term that came to mean 'misplaced assumptions about causality stemming from a faulty understanding of nature'. Such superstitious techniques included scrying, geomancy, aeromancy, horary and genethliacal astrology. Bygone esoteric practices nonetheless have been superseded by statistical calculations, something that modern forecasting technologies and algorithms rest on. Prediction, once the preserve of magic and prophecy, has perhaps even more importance to modern secular society. According to Max Weber, accurate calculations as a strategy of *social action* is the foundational principle of development inherent in the process of 'civilisation'. What this implies is that forecasting as a consequence can be mobilised to *cause* action in the present. If we consider forecasting through Foucault's social constructivist view on the scientific discourse as producing its 'facts', then one can say that through the projection our desires, we prepare the environment in which to facilitate it, allowing for our interpretations of the future to become possible. Today, the presence of the divination spirit reflects how this tradition has not so much as survived, a term that suggests persistence of old forms, but rather continued, a term which suggests new meanings and boundaries. For example, prophecy was replaced by political and economic forecasting and science fiction, and weather prediction metamorphosed into weather forecasts issued by government meteorologist.

### *Divination paradoxical paradigm: understanding the irrational with irrational means*

Where does the deep-rooted irrational fear of the irrational nature of paradox come from? Why does the thought of a self-referential system scare the pants off of highly educated and sensible people? In the early 20th century many mathematicians and logicians, including David Hilbert and Bertrand Russell made big efforts to resolve the internal contradictions of the fundamentals of science by constructing a solid foundation based on few axioms. It was their conviction that this constituted the deepest bedrock of human thought thus the *Principia Mathematica* was created to barricade out paradoxes. However, when one logician, Kurt Gödel, came and took a few of those basic axioms and showed that one could reach complete contradictions with them, the discussion of fundamentals closed. What Gödel showed was that the basic axioms on which mathematicians depended on contained an irrational factor which could not be eliminated. As such, what he unearthed was an aspect of something abysmal which could not be grasped, and realised that the foundations were in fact built on air. In its pursuit to attain absolute knowledge, the dream of the Enlightenment to prove all things mathematically and logically was to turn in on itself and eventually to be eaten up by its own reasoning. Similarly, Gödel, used numbers to reason about the nature of mathematics and revealed instead the limits and blind spots of formal systems. As if in an act of defiance, uncertainty, incompleteness and irrationality had seemed to pervade at the foundations of 'human thought'. To paraphrase Bruno Latour's lament and question on the difference of deconstruction and constructivism: can we devise a powerful tool that deals with matters of concern in a way that doesn't *debunk* but *protects* reality from being chipped away (Latour, 2004)?

In a not too far parallel universe, these irrational numbers or natural integers, are what precisely makes it a good tool with which to grasp something irrational, and that is the basis of divination. In this fluid paradigm, a paradoxical self-referential loop of reasoning doesn't render it inconsistent, but rather offers flickering glimpses to contemplate the synchronistic phenomena of meaningful chance gatherings of events that are not causally related. Synchronistic thinking as the "acausal complement to causality, a system of explanation equal to causality but differing from it in its understanding of time and space as elastic with regard to the psyche" (Shanken, 2010), transcends the space-time and physis-psyche divide of causality, and of rational inconsistency.

\*Synchronicity = divination = transcending limits of mental and physical realm / tendency of things occurring together



#### Non-number divination.

- Almost all non-number divination techniques are based on some kind of chaotic pattern, which actually is exactly like the Rorschach test (chaotic patterns). One stares at a chaotic pattern and then gets a fantasy, and the complete disorder in the pattern confuses one's conscious mind. We could all be mediums, and all have absolute knowledge, if the bright light of our ego consciousness would not dim it.
- project of desires, interpretation and embodiment
- The unconscious is described by as having three characteristics, or dynamism of the unconscious;
  - \*spirit contains a spontaneous psychic principle of movement and activity;
  - \*secondly, that it has the quality of freely creating images beyond our sense perception (in a dream one has no sense perception the spirit or the unconscious creates images from within, while the sense perceptions are asleep);
  - \*and thirdly, there is an autonomous and sovereign manipulation of those images. e.g dream
- Jung believes in the absolute knowledge of the unconscious, which we know exists, as we can see from dreams. The unconscious *knows* things; it knows the past and future, it knows things about other people.

#### Number divination.

- From a psychological perspective, Jung has said that “number” is the most primitive expression of the “spirit”.
- The reason why mathematician Weyl struggled to grapple with such a contradiction was in thinking that numbers are a mere rational and transparent invention. von Franz suggests that numbers are possibly from the unconscious, a place of irrational, spirit, autonomous. “..numbers are entities which the human mind can posit and manipulate, but we manipulate only the derivative. The original thing which inspired one to make counting sticks, is autonomous and belongs to the creative spirit of the unconscious.”
- Dr. von Franz speculates that counting probably originated first with counting aids or reckoning aids (pebbles, stones, sticks..etc), which were a way for human consciousness to get a hold of number – probably the first *system* to investigate reality developed after non-number divinations such as dreams and instinctual unconscious hunches. For primitive man, they owned as far as they could count and then the rest would be infinity - the godhead. For many tribes the concept of the group or 'many' covers the concept of the infinite. Nowadays, through mathematics and advance technology, we have more means to handle the many, the infinite. However, if man believes that he can handle an infinite series of natural numbers, that is an inflation, an identification with the archetype of the Self, or of the godhead. She compares this to making the same fatal mistake of thinking that a statistical truth *is* the truth, for we are really only handling an abstract concept and not reality itself, and into that thought then sneaks identification with the godhead in which one secretly believes that they can master nature and find the truth about everything. In the same way, historian, Luian Boia also tries to emphasize that we are tempted to confuse 'existing reality' with the 'virtual reality' of (scientific) models, as they are “...simplified, coherent and synthetic versions of a certain dimension of reality or determined process. They are extremely useful as long as we remember that they are not the real thing: they are methodological fictions”

### *Para-rational model and modes of consciousness*

- divination involves complementary modes of cognition associated with primary process (presentational) and secondary process of thinking (representational). During a divination, diviners construct usable knowledge from oracular messages by linking diverse domains of representational information and symbolism with emotional or presentational experience. inductive (rational), intuitive (non-rational) and interpretative narrative techniques as ways of knowing are simultaneously recognised and employed by diviners in their native language when elicited to form a theory of divination.
- in a similar spirit, I propose a position to accommodate both rational and irrational ways of knowing, a para-rational model.

### *Technoscience: taming irrational with rational means.*

- Rational prediction as social control.
  - accurate prediction lay in the heart of rationalism.
  - The principle of development inherent in the process of 'civilization' was driven by the use of calculation as a strategy of *social action*.
  - What this implies is that prediction as a consequence can be mobilised to *cause* action in the present.
  - If we consider forecasting through social constructivist view on the scientific discourse as producing its 'facts', then one can say that through the projection our desires, we prepare the environment in which to facilitate it, allowing for our interpretations of the future to become possible. This also reflects Foucault's conception of knowledge as having the power to *make itself true*.
  - As such, rationalism, another credo of the 19th century reform movements, set the chasm between what was considered a rational way to 'calculate' and the superstitious way (faulty understanding of nature, a definition in the late 18th century ) to predict. Statistical calculations superseded and marginalized older superstitious forecasts about the future. 'The rise of a culture of planning, is, in fact, a form of secular prediction'. The suicide of Robert Fitzroy, the first head of the new governmental department of meteorology in England, was caused by disastrously wrong weather forecasts in the newspapers. As a result, the sensitivity towards such terms as prognostications, prophecy, or forecasts were tainted due to the association of practicing 'superstition'.
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- Meteorology as a social process. Occupational *futurework*  
Weather prediction is defining, controlling and presenting uncertainty as confident knowledge. Public prediction as a social process and four elements are necessary:
    - 1) gathered data. acquiring empirical data by technological devices and the implications of dependency. machine agency (latour)
    - 2) disciplinary theory. models of knowledge are essential to allow for extrapolation of gathered data
    - 3) historicized experience. learning from patterns by comparing between past and present data.
    - 4) institutional legitimization. how the prediction is validated. on construction of power and knowledge. reflections on discursive practices (foucault, Perkins, latour)

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